

Ouardani , Nandita Chaudhary

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FEEDING, BONDING, AND THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

*Ethnographic Challenges
to Attachment Theory and Early
Childhood Interventions*

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Leberecht Funk, Gabriel Scheidecker, Bambi L. Chapin, Wiebke J. Schmidt, Christine El

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Feeding, Bonding, and the Formation of Social Relationships

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Abstract: This Element explores multifaceted linkages between feeding and relationship formation based on ethnographic case studies in Morocco, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Costa Rica. Research demonstrates that there are many culturally valued ways of feeding children, contradicting the idea of a single universally optimal feeding standard. It demonstrates further that, in many parts of the world, feeding plays a central role in bonding and relationship formation, something largely overlooked in current developmental theories. Analysis shows that feeding contributes to relationship formation through what we call proximal, transactional, and distal dimensions. This Element argues that feeding practices can lead to qualitatively distinct forms of relationships. It has important theoretical and practical implications, calling for the expansion of attachment theory to include feeding and body-centered caregiving and significant changes to global interventions currently based on “responsive feeding.” This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

Keywords: feeding, attachment theory, ethnographic research, early childhood interventions, cross-cultural comparison

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